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Interwar Camden

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Willis, Ian C., "Interwar Camden" (2016). *Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts - Papers*. 2713.
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Interwar Camden

Abstract

The interwar period in Camden was a time of economic development and material progress. The prosperity of the period was driven by the local dairy industry and the emerging coal industry. The population of the town grew by over 35 per cent between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second, so that in 1939 the town was the centre of a district that covered 455 square miles (1180 square kilometres) and with a population of over 5000.

Keywords

camden, interwar

Disciplines

Arts and Humanities | Law

Publication Details

I. C. Willis 2016 Interwar Camden Camden History Notes <https://camdenhistorynotes.wordpress.com/2016/05/28/interwar-camden/>

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Interwar Camden

camdenhistorynotes / May 28, 2016



Central Camden showing the intersection of Argyle St (Hume Highway) and John St. View west along Argyle St, WH Anderson fountain in middle of intersection, c1930s (Camden Images)

The interwar period in Camden was a time of economic development and material progress. The prosperity of the period was driven by the local dairy industry and the emerging coal industry. The population of the town grew by over 35 per cent between the end of the First World War and the beginning of the Second, so that in 1939 the town was the centre of a district that covered 455 square miles (1180 square kilometres) and with a population of over 5000.

Camden was one of the most important commercial and administrative centres between Sydney and Goulburn. The town was the centre of the police district, it had the regional hospital, it was the largest population centre and it was a transport node of a district which spread from Campbelltown to the lower Blue Mountains.



Cooks Garage, Argyle St, Camden the route of the Hume Highway through the town in the 1930s, 1936 (Camden Images)

Hume Highway

During the interwar period one of the most important economic arteries of the town was the Hume Highway (until 1928 the Great South Road). Most understood the value of the rail connection to Camden; most obviously because you heard it, smelt it and saw it. Yet few understand the significance of the Hume. The highway had ran up the town's main street from colonial times, until 1973 when it was moved to the Camden Bypass, and then subsequently moved in 1980 to the freeway.

The highway and railway were the conduits that brought the international influences of modernism and consumerism to the town, and the goods and services that supported them. These forces influenced the development of the local motor industry , the establishment of the local cinemas and the development of the local airfield. All important economic, social and cultural forces for the time. 'Locals' travelled to the city for higher order retail goods, specialist services and entertainment, while the landed gentry escaped to the cosmopolitan centre of the British Empire; London. Conversely the Sydney elite came to experience the new gentlemanly pastime of flying at the Macquarie Grove Airfield.



Camden Vale Inn & Milk Bar, Camden, c.1939 (Camden Images)

Camden Modernism

For a country town of its size the town had modern facilities and was up-to-date with the latest technology. The town had two weekly newspapers, Camden News and the Camden Advertiser, there was opening of the telephone exchange (1910), the installation of reticulated gas (1912), electricity (1929), replacement of gas street lighting with electric lights (1932) and a sewerage system (1939), and by 1939 the population has increased to 2394. The town's prosperity allowed the Presbyterians built a new church (1938), while a number of 'locals' built solid brick cottages that reflected their confidence in the town's future.

Despite the prosperity of the interwar period the town was still dominated by the colonial gentry and their estates. Apart from their convict labour in the early years, they established a system of class and social relations that ordered daily life in the town from its foundation until after the Second World War. While the townsmen dominated the early period of local government, by Federation the landed gentry had usurped their power and had imposed their political mantra of conservatism on the area. The dominance of the Macarthur's Camden Park over the local economy during the interwar period was characterised by the construction of the Camden Vale milk processing factory (1926) adjacent to the railway. The company developed TB free milk and marketed it through the Camden Vale Milk Bar, a retail outlet on the Hume Highway (1939); complete with a drive-through.

The interwar years were a period of transition and increasingly the motor car replaced the horse in town, and on the farm the horse was replaced by the tractor, all of which supported the growing number of garages in the town. The interwar landscape was characterised by personalised service, along with home and farm deliveries by both horse and cart and motor cars.



Bank of New South Wales, 1938, Argyle St,
Camden the route of the Hume Highway (I
Willis)

Morphology of town centre

The layout and shape of interwar Camden has changed little from the 19th century and the town centre has a certain bucolic charm and character that is the basis of the community's identity and sense of place. The strip shopping and mixed land use support the country feel that has become the basis of the modern 'country town idyll'.

In recent years Camden has been targeted by the New South Wales government as one of the growth centre for the Sydney metropolitan area. It has become part of Sydney's exurbanisation on the rural-urban fringe. City types move out of the city looking for places where 'the country looks like the country'. This has only served to re-enforce the duality of the love/hate relationship the community had with Sydney and the city/country divide that has been part of the rural ideology of the area.

The 'locals' for their part have retreated to nostalgia in the form of an Arcadian view of the world through a 'country town idyll'. The romance of the idyll is based on the iconic imagery of Camden as a picturesque English village, with the church on the hill, surrounded by rural vistas. The idyll has become a defence mechanism against the onslaught from Sydney's urbanization and the interwar heritage that is part of the town's iconic landscape.



Macquarie Grove Airfield 1930s Camden (Camden Images)

Selected Examples of Interwar Architecture in Camden

1. Camden Vale milk processing factory, 11 Argyle Street, Camden. Built in 1926 by the Camden Vale Milk Co, a subsidiary of Camden Park Estate Pty Ltd.
2. Camden Vale Inn, Remembrance Drive (Old Hume Highway), Camden (now Camden Valley Inn). Architect: Cyril Ruwald. Builder: Herb English. A milk bar on the Hume Highway built in 1939 by the Camden Park Estate Pty Ltd to market its Camden Vale milk from TB tested dairy herds on Camden Park. It was 'designed in the Tudor style, with walls in attractively coloured brickwork suggesting a touch of modernity'. [Camden Park Estate Pty Ltd, Camden Vale Special Pasteurised Milk Production and Distribution, Camden, Camden Park Estate Pty Ltd, c.1939.]
3. Cooks Garage, 31-33 Argyle Street, Camden. Built in 1935. Owned by WH Cook. It was built in the Spanish Mission style, and was characterised by terracotta roof tiles, a front loggia, rendering of brickwork and shaped parapets. Since demolished.
4. Main Southern Garage, 20-28 Argyle Street, Camden. Built in the mid 1930s.
5. Dunk House, 56-62 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden, in 1937. The building was a car showroom, shop complex and professional suites owned by EC Dunk.
6. Clintons Motor Showroom, 16 Argyle Street, Camden. The car showroom was built in 1947 by Mark Jensen for Clinton Motors, the Holden dealership in Camden. According to the Camden Heritage Inventory it is a rare masonry Art Deco style building with large shopfront windows and wrap around awning.
7. 102-104 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1939. Stuckey Bros, bakers and pastry cooks, occupied premises and fitted it out in 1940. According to the Camden News it was 'fitted with every modern device'.
8. Bank of New South Wales (Westpac), 121-123 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1936. The two storey building had a residence upstairs and a banking chamber downstairs. According to the Camden Heritage Inventory the building is Georgian Revival style.



Camden's Argyle St (Hume Highway) in 1938 with Bank of New South Wales and Rural Bank on left looking east
(Camden Images)

9. Rural Bank, 115-119 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1937. The two storey building had a residence upstairs with banking chamber downstairs. Art deco style. There is trachyte stonework on the facing of building.

Churches

10. Presbyterian Church, 42 John Street, Camden. Built in 1938. Architect: George Gray, R.Vale. A brick church, which according to the Camden Heritage Inventory the buildings is Gothic Revival (Gothic Interwar) style.

Hotels

11. Camden Inn (Hotel), 105-107 Argyle Street, Camden. Built by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden in 1933. Tudor style.

Agriculture

12. Front, AH&I Hall, 191-195 Argyle Street, Camden. The brick front of the building was added to the weatherboard hall in 1936. The original hall was constructed in 1899 by George Furner for JW Macarthur Onslow as a drill hall for the Camden Mounted Rifles.

13. Paramount Theatre, 39 Elizabeth Street, Camden. Built in 1933. It was owned by DJ Kennedy who had interests in other suburban movie cinemas in the Sydney area. It was designed in the Spanish Mission style.

14. Cottage, 25 Elizabeth Street, Camden. Built in the 1930s by Mel Peat.

15. Flats, 33 Elizabeth Street, Camden. Built in 1930.

Menangle Road, Camden

16. Cottages, 1-3 Menangle Road, Camden. Built between 1924-1925 by Harry Willis and Sons, Camden. According to the Camden Heritage Inventory a group of Californian Bungalows.

17. Methodist Parsonage, 24 Menangle Road, Camden. Built in 1935.

18. Cottage, 26 Menangle Road, Camden. Built by Mel Peat in 1931 for N Freestone.

Murray Street, Camden.

19. Cottages, 24-28 Murray Street, Camden. Built by Mel Peat in 1937. According to the Camden Heritage Inventory a group of Californian Bungalows.

20. Extension, Camden Hospital, Menangle Road, Camden. Built by Mel Peat in 1939.



Bellman Hangar at Camden Airfield 1941 (I Willis)

21. Bellman Hangers, Camden Airfield, Macquarie Grove Road, Camden. Built in 1941. The Federal Government acquired the airfield from Edward Macarthur Onslow in 1940 for a central flying school under the Empire Air Training Scheme. The hangers were erected by RAAF as temporary accommodation for aircraft. They were designed by NS Bellman in 1936 (UK) as temporary buildings.

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